

# VIDEO

## FAQ

**Q** I love using Media Center in Vista with a remote, but it seems to lack controls for changing picture quality settings. It's also difficult to choose audio and subtitle options. Is there any way to add these features?

**A** You can add these abilities easily using a pair of free programs. First, you'll need the latest version of FFDshow, a handy program that works alongside your media player software. FFDshow enables your media player to play a variety of video file formats, such as DivX and H.264. It also has numerous options for enhancing picture quality using post processing. You can download it from <http://tinyurl.com/5suml>.

However, to use FFDshow in Media Center you'll also need the Media Control Plugin. This is available from <http://tinyurl.com/ytd2vu>. Once installed it allows you to use many of FFDshow's options in Media Center using the remote control. You won't need to reach for the mouse when you want to change to English subtitles.

**Seth Barton**

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## LINKSYS Kiss 1600

★★★★★

£204 inc VAT

When we looked at the Kiss DP-600 multimedia player in our December 2006 issue, it impressed us with its combination of upscaling DVD playback and media streaming abilities. However, start-up times and the menu system were sluggish.

Kiss has since been taken over by Linksys. The first thing you notice about the new Kiss 1600 is how much smaller it is than its predecessor. Although this may be an advantage to some, it does mean it no longer stacks neatly with other hi-fi components.

The 1600 retains the DVD drive, so you can replace your current DVD player entirely. It can upscale DVDs to HD resolutions and output the resulting image through either component or HDMI. However, some of our test DVDs would not upscale over either component or HDMI, due to copy-protection issues.

Upscaled DVD playback works well, although how much you'll benefit from it depends on your HD TV. Owners of modern sets with good internal upscaling will notice little difference, while those with older HD TVs or ones with poor electronics will certainly benefit. It's far harder to get excited about upscaling now that Blu-ray and HD DVD movies are becoming common.

The rear of the unit is awash with inputs and outputs. As well as HDMI and component, there are SCART, S-video and composite outputs. The 1600 doesn't have the surround-sound decoder of the DP-600, but it does have both optical and coaxial S/PDIF outputs so you can hook it up to a surround-sound decoder. Alternatively, there are stereo phono outputs for connecting to a hi-fi.

As well as DVDs, the 1600 is capable of dealing with a wide range of media file formats. This includes all the ones you're ever



likely to need, including MP3, MPEG4 and JPEG. Such files can be streamed over a wired or wireless network, taken from USB storage devices via the USB2 port on the rear or played from a wide range of optical media using the DVD-ROM drive.

The 1600 is compatible with any UPnP server software, such as Microsoft's Media Connect, which is now part of Windows Media Player 11. It does not, however, support any kind of digital rights management, so you can't stream protected music.

Setting up the player and accessing content is very straightforward. The interface is responsive but rather minimal, and you don't get thumbnails for pictures or video clips. There's also no way skip forwards or backwards through video content being streamed, which is infuriating if you press the back button and end up at the beginning of the clip again.

The remote control is rather confusing, as the buttons are all the same colour and a similar size, so it's hard to locate a key quickly.

The Kiss 1600 is a great product with all the outputs and network connections you could need, and it supports a wide range of video formats. If you're going to use it as an upscaling DVD player as well, then it's well worth the money. If you don't need the DVD player, the 1600's tricky interface means that other streaming media players are better value.

*Seth Barton*

### SUMMARY

- ✓ Simple to set up and use
- ✓ Built-in DVD player
- ✗ No thumbnail views

MEDIA-STREAMING DEVICE USB2, Ethernet and 802.11a/b/g interfaces, HDMI, component, SCART, S-video, composite video, optical and coaxial S/PDIF and phono stereo outputs  
PART CODE KISS1600-UK  
SUPPLIER [www.broadbandstuff.co.uk](http://www.broadbandstuff.co.uk)  
DETAILS [www-uk.linksys.com](http://www-uk.linksys.com)

## Also consider...

### SLING MEDIA Slingbox

★★★★★

£105 inc VAT

PRICE CUT!



The Slingbox allows you to watch television anywhere in the world, as if you were sitting in your own living room. It has SCART and S-video inputs, so you can plug in whichever set-top boxes you want.

It's simple to use, and even includes onscreen mock-ups of your remote controls.

This is a great product that's essential if you can't live without your TV.



VIDEO-STREAMING DEVICE SCART and S-video inputs, Freeview tuner, IR transmitter, 10/100 Ethernet port  
PART CODE SB150-110 SUPPLIER [www.laptopsdirect.co.uk](http://www.laptopsdirect.co.uk)  
DETAILS [www.slingmedia.com](http://www.slingmedia.com) ✓  
Works well with set-top boxes; easy to set up ✗ Can't timeshift Freeview  
FULL REVIEW Sep 2006

### CANON MD101

★★★★★

£163 inc VAT



The MD101 is a great camcorder, at an extremely low price. It has a widescreen LCD, which means that what you see on the screen is what you get on your TV.

Picture quality is excellent in good lighting conditions, with realistic colours and very little noise. Only the lack of a USB port is disappointing.



DV CAMERA MiniDV storage, 30x optical zoom, 1/4in 0.8-megapixel CCD, 2.7in LCD screen, phono and composite output, FireWire interface  
SUPPLIER [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)  
DETAILS [www.canon.co.uk](http://www.canon.co.uk)  
PART CODE 1881B007AA  
✓ Decent image quality; good battery life ✗ No USB port  
FULL REVIEW Aug 2007

Battery life: -50% Reference +50% +100%

## TVONICS DVR-FP250

★★★★★

£190 inc VAT

Free-to-air digital TV in the UK has been promoted by the Freeview brand since 2002. This is now being used to promote a range of Freeview hard disk recorders featuring the Freeview Playback logo. The recorders will be available from a range of manufacturers and will have to support a basic set of features. The idea is to raise the profile of these devices to compete with subscription-based systems such as Sky+.

The TVonics DVR-FP250 is the first Freeview Playback recorder we've seen. It's a rather unusual design with a curved black metal casing. It can sit horizontally or vertically in the supplied stand. There are no buttons whatsoever, so losing the remote control would be disastrous.

On the rear are two SCART sockets for connecting your TV and a video recorder if desired. There's also an RF input, as well as an RF passthrough should you wish to connect the aerial signal to another device. There are no separate audio outputs, though, so you'll need a special SCART lead with phono outputs to hook it up to your hi-fi.

Setup was completely automated, and it found all the expected channels. Television and radio channels are sensibly separated, with a button on the remote control switching between the two sets. The menu system is easy to navigate and reacts instantly to your inputs, and the remote is comfortable to use and easy to understand.

Video quality is good, and colours look natural. It certainly matches up to any of the tuners we've seen built into digital TV sets.



Unusually, the DVR-FP250 has no mute or volume control, so you can't control volume levels on the set-top box itself. However, the remote can be programmed to control your TV directly, but this means you have to press the TV button on the remote every time you adjust the volume.

The electronic programme guide is clearly laid out and easy to use. The big 250GB hard disk means you can record around 135 hours of programmes. As a Freeview Playback device, scheduled recordings will automatically move if there are schedule changes, and you can record an entire series with one command. However, not all broadcasters fully support these features.

There are twin tuners, so you can record one show while watching another. The hard disk instantly starts caching any programme when you change channels. This fills up to a two-hour buffer, so you can rewind the programme if needed. Disappointingly, you can't record one show while timeshifting another or record two shows at once. This makes it a lot less flexible than our favourite hard disk recorder, the Top Up TV DTR (see 'Also Consider...' below).

With a well-designed interface and a big hard disk the DVR-FP250 is very reasonably priced. However, its inflexible recording and timeshifting options are a major drawback and mean we can't award the DVR-FP250 top marks.

Seth Barton

### SUMMARY

- ✓ Big hard disk
- ✓ Freeview Playback features
- ✗ Limited options to record and timeshift

HARD DISK RECORDER 2x digital tuner, 250GB hard disk, RF input, RF output, 2x SCART  
PART CODE DVR-250(FP1)  
SUPPLIER TVonics 08708 030551  
DETAILS [www.tvonics.com](http://www.tvonics.com)

## CHOOSING A... DV Camera

Follow the steps to find your ideal specs

CCD: 800,000 pixels  
ZOOM: 10x optical/300x digital  
VIDEO PORTS: FireWire out, S-video out  
MONITORING: Mono viewfinder, 2½" colour LCD  
MEDIA: MiniDV tape  
STILLS CAPTURE: 640x480 to tape  
EXTRAS: Remote control  
Recommended minimum in grey

**1** If you just want to make home movies, a digital video (DV) camera with the specs above will be fine and cost around £160. A range of auto-exposure modes will ensure you get decent results in all conditions. The LCD provides easy playback on location, while the remote control allows for comfortable viewing on the sofa. If you'll be using the zoom a lot, concentrate on the optical zoom specification. Check the battery life, which should preferably be 90 minutes or more, and consider budgeting for an extra battery.

**2** To edit video, get a model that provides DV-in. You can transfer edited footage back to MiniDV tape and run off VHS copies through the camera's S-video out. Cameras with S-video in can often be used to capture analogue video.

**3** Enthusiasts will pay extra for a more flexible camera. Good manual focus and a colour viewfinder make for better camerawork, an external microphone transforms your audio and good battery and charger options keep you filming for longer. A high-resolution CCD might improve video quality, but while this and a flash memory slot will make your DV camera double as a digital camera, quality will be basic. For the best-quality video, look for a model with three CCDs. This gives more realistic colour reproduction and reduces picture noise to a minimum.

**4** Miniature DV cameras, especially those that use tiny MicroMV tapes or memory cards, may tempt gadget-lovers, but picture quality could be compromised. Cameras that replace tape with a hard disk or DVD are more useful, making your footage more manageable.

**5** If you're serious about film-making, £1,500 buys you a DV camera with superb optics, three CCDs and the requisite connectors to attach equally expensive professional AV accessories. High Definition camcorders are available, and worth considering if you have an HD TV.

## TERRATEC Cinergy DT USB XS Diversity

★★★★★

£66 inc VAT



This USB TV tuner uses diversity to take a signal from two tuners and aerials to improve reception in areas with weak signal strength. Alternatively, you can use the tuners independently to receive one programme while recording another.

The included software is easy to use, image quality is good, and the remote control is clearly labelled. It's the best dual tuner we've seen.

USB TV TUNER USB2 interface, dual digital tuners, 2x RF inputs  
PART CODE 10456 SUPPLIER [www.pixmania.co.uk](http://www.pixmania.co.uk) DETAILS <http://uk.terratec.net> ✓ Twin tuners with diversity; can schedule two recordings at once ✗ No timeline EPG  
FULL REVIEW Oct 2006



## TOP UP TV TUTV Anytime DTR

★★★★★

£140 inc VAT



This hard disk Freeview recorder

has twin tuners, so you can watch one programme while recording another. It has a 160GB hard disk, which is enough for more than 100 hours of recordings.

As well as the usual Freeview broadcasts, you can opt to receive additional Top Up TV programming downloaded to the hard disk for £10 a month. It's an inexpensive way of improving your TV viewing.

HARD DISK RECORDER 2x digital tuners, 160GB hard disk, RF input, RF output, 2x SCART, S-video, composite, stereo phono and coaxial S/PDIF output SUPPLIER Top Up TV 08700 543210 DETAILS [www.topuptv.com](http://www.topuptv.com) ✓ Subscription service ready ✗ Commitment to subscribe; awkward EPG FULL REVIEW Jul 2007

